Edwin Barlow Recalls Early Days in Rawsonville Vicinity

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Remember when Rawsonville was booming, real estate promoters were active and the tavern was a busy place?

Not many of us do for that was a good many years ago. But in Rawsonville there is one resident who remembers those days. That man is Edwin Barlow.

Looking forward now to his 92-nd birthday, Mr. Barlow with amazing clearness of memory, compares with pioneer days the real estate activity now springing up in his neighborhood in anticipation of the new Ford airplane plant. Real estate salesmen were responsible for a large part of the tavern patronage back in the early days and Mr. Barlow recalls development of business and social life which marked Rawsonville as the livest center of lower Michigan west of Detroit.

And as he observes the present trend, reflecting upon the past as he has seen it, he arrives at a philosophy of the future founded upon faith. "Democracy in the world," he says, "can be revived by faith. Small church groups should never have been abandoned for large congregations" commented the veteran philosopher, for closer ties of the smaller organizations do away with many hatreds and jealousies.

Born in Year 1849

Born October 22, 1849 on a farm near Belleville, his first recollections of formal education are at a select school at Belleville. 'Select' in that it was not public, the school was of pioneer tradition, with benches of planks supported by pegged legs. "Some times we were called upon to read" he said, "and again we were not, but in any case we could be certain of swift and inflexible discipline."

Later, when the family had moved to Rawsonville, he attended a school on the site of the present building. Enrollment was 150.

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Edwin Barlow

Seats were along the side walls while the center was reserved for recitations and as an arena for punishment— chiefly administered with a ruler vigorously applied on the palm of the hand. One of the first mass chastisements recalled by Mr. Barlow involved fifty pupils who had so far relaxed from school tension as to stray to the banks of the Huron during the lunch hour.

One of the favorites recreations was ice skating. The first skates made by Mr. Barlow were of Indian style, made from hard wood cut wedge shape. Later these were replaced by a pair with steel runners and wooden straps made with the aid of the village blacksmith.

The elderly philosopher considers that he made his first real acquaintanceship with education when he attended Belleville High school in the late sixties. Here, as was customary in those days there was no grading system, "You just went until you wanted to quit." Clark's grammar and Davis' arithmetic were the principal texts.

Earns First Slate

By selling six bushels of ashes, the youth made eighteen cents with which to purchase a slate today one of his choice possessions. On the slate is the signature of Henry Ford, lovingly protected by glass. Music was taught if the teacher had the ability, and religious services, conducted when the instructor had time, were tuned to his individual philosophies and beliefs.

Teachers 'boarded around.' The board and room were furnished free and the handsome salary of four dollars a week was added for good measure. They had no special training but were graduates of the eighth grade. Later, superintendents in the district gave examinations to determine the qualifications of applicants. One of the earliest instructors recalled by Mr. Barlow is Mrs. Hattie Kelsey Crittenden, a Quakeress.

Entertainment for the young people of the community was furnished by writing and singing schools and dancing parties, all of which were held in the evenings. The late Professor Frederick H. Pease was a frequent visitor at the townmeetings and conducted songfests. Mr. Barlow laughingly recalled the taffy-pulls to which the guests carried molasses, "the seventy-five-cent kind." "This old-fashioned syrup 'grained' as that today will not" he explains.

The Sunday School, directed by William Clark, mill owner, school superintendent and treasurer, was an important center of activity.

Young men didn't attend social functions until they were twenty-one, when supposedly they would have sufficient money to pay for refreshments and dancing and horse and buggy care. About two hundred people usually gathered at the larger parties.

Salary $2 Per Day

Work for the young married men, not land holders, included pulling beans, husking corn and spinning in the woolen mills near by. The two dollars earned in a day were considered ample compensation.

Across the Huron river where a new steel bridge was erected in 1936 was a wooden stringer plank structure. Before that, a crude crossing of planks was made without side railings.

"My father's forefathers migrated from Denmark to England," Mr. Barlow recalled. There is now a Barlow place in Lancaster. The American branch came to Connecticut and then on to Michigan in 1837, and later moved to Kansas, where they settled on a 160 acre tract of land for which they paid $1.25 per acre.

Here, after filing claim, they erected a fourteen-foot-square house and planted hedgerows and crops, but were beseiged by many calamities. Prairie fires took their toll and locusts swarmed to nullify the hardy pioneers' efforts. The hoppers were so plentiful in one season that they drifted into piles reaching sometimes to the window ledges. Again, a bushel of wheat at 25 cents was needed in trade to obtain one pound of coffee. In 1895 the family returned to Rawsonville and in 1910 Mr. Barlow followed and there has since resided, the revered patriarch of his community.

In 1895 Mr. Barlow with his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Mosley had the pleasure of revisiting the western scene. At Wichita, Kansas, which he remembered as a town of twenty inhabitants, they visited Mrs. Trella Utz who as a girl lived next door to the Barlows for many years. He also discovered that the land purchased so many years previously had recently been sold at an advance of seventy dollars an acre.

Public offices held by Mr. Barlow included the postmastership at Rawsonville in 1881 and 1885. In 1897 he was the owner of a grist mill. His father had a general store, was justice, grist mill owner and postmaster.

His marriage took place June 28, 1877.

The children of Mr. Barlow are Carl, a principal at Fairbanks school, Detroit; Mrs. Edna Maris, Northwestern High School, Detroit; Mrs. Clarence Bennett, Rawsonville; and the late Mrs. Helen Mosley, Detroit.